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Soon, winter will be winding down and homeowners will start planning - and prepping for - a variety of outdoor projects for spring. From cleaning, repairing or replacing decks, to creating raised beds for veggies and flowers, now is the time to start gearing up for those spring projects.

Cleaning Up

Start with spring cleaning existing structures. Take a weekend to clean decks, gazebos and pergolas of dirt, debris, mold and mildew. For structures made of naturally durable Western Red Cedar, a broom, garden sprayer and hose, plus a little bleach are all you need.

Sweep winter debris such as twigs and leaves from decks, taking care to clean between planks on horizontal surfaces. This facilitates airflow and drainage, and can help prevent a buildup of moisture when spring showers arrive. Next, use a garden sprayer to apply a mild oxygen bleach solution to kill mold and mildew. Be sure to leave the bleach solution on the wood surface for approximately 30 minutes, and then rinse with water. Never use a pressure washer as it can damage the wood.

Maintenance and Repair

Carefully inspect outdoor structures for wear and tear. While Western Red Cedar contains natural preservatives that make the wood durable, all outdoor structures require annual care, including those made of pressure-treated lumber or composites.

Check planks, beams and boards for cracking, warping or rough spots and repair accordingly. Replace damaged wood, and be sure to examine hardware to ensure it's working properly and free of rust.

New Projects

If you've always dreamed about lounging on a lovely deck on a summer afternoon, or savoring a spring morning beneath the shade of a decorative pergola, now's the time to start planning the project.

A great deck is the showpiece of an inspired backyard, and spring is a prime time to add one. To ensure your deck affords you the most value and enjoyment, consider using an online deck planner to help you envision your deck before you begin building.

As gardening grows in popularity, you might consider adding raised planting beds to your landscaping. Raised beds not only make caring for and harvesting your garden easier - no bending required - they can also function as a decorative enhancement to your outdoor environment.

The material you choose will influence the longevity, beauty and enjoyment of your structure, so carefully consider your options before deciding.

"Many homeowners choose Western Red Cedar for its beauty and natural durability," says Paul Mackie, western area manager, Western Red Cedar Lumber Association, or "Mr. Cedar" as he is known in the industry. "It has a deep, rich luster that other woods and man-made materials just can't match. Plus, it's a greener choice because it's renewable and recyclable - unlike composites - and doesn't require chemical treatment as non-durable wood species do. It's naturally rot and insect resistant, and you can stain it or leave it natural, depending on your preference."

The green qualities and durability of Western Red Cedar make it a great choice for virtually any outdoor structure - including those popular wooden playsets that begin appearing like

wildflowers in backyards across the country every spring.

Whatever project you're dreaming of this spring - from building a new deck, pergola, or planting beds to refurbishing an existing outdoor structure or playset: careful planning, cleaning, maintenance and the right materials can ensure your project adds value and beauty to your home environment.